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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether teachers in districts using state-mandated (traditional) teacher evaluation systems or educators in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived teacher evaluation as having a stronger positive impact on school improvement, professional development, and student learning. Data were obtained from 21 school districts through the Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP) (R. Stiggans and D. Duke, 1988). TEP responses were received from 4,092 teachers. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews with the personnel director in each district. Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having stronger impacts on school improvement, professional development, and student learning than state-mandated evaluation systems. Findings also indicate that locally developed evaluation systems were better able to support district school reform initiatives, guide professional development, and use student learning as a focus for teacher evaluation. Implications for practice are discussed. An appendix contains three tables of study data. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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# Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation Systems and Their Impact on School Improvement, Professional Development and Student Learning

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**Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation Systems and Their Impact on School Improvement, Professional Development and Student Learning**

Purpose

The evaluation of teachers in public schools has been and continues to be a process involving procedures based on theory and effective practices, as well as state and local guidelines. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1988) states that in order to educate students effectively educational institutions must use evaluation to select, retain and develop personnel. Considering the important purposes of teacher evaluation and the investment that is made in both human and financial resources, it is essential for the evaluation of teachers to be an effective means to aid in accountability, foster professional development, and increase student learning. However, teacher evaluation as practiced in the majority of school districts is often ineffective with little impact on the quality of education that students receive (Cousins, 1995; Frase & Streshly, 1994; Joint Committee, 1988; Peterson, 1995; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995; Stiggans & Duke, 1988), and often ineffective in facilitating professional development in a meaningful way (Killian & Wood, 1996; Loup, Garland, Ellett & Rugutt, 1996; Searfoss & Enz, 1996; Stiggans & Duke, 1988; Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin & Bernstein, 1984). Further, traditional teacher evaluation systems that incorporate procedures guided by performance standards and announced observations (Duke, 1995), have been widely criticized (Joint Committee, 1988; Peterson, 1995; Stiggans & Duke, 1988; Wise et al., 1984). Alternative evaluation systems (methods of evaluating teachers other than in a traditional manner or by a required system) adapted to the needs of a particular district, school or teacher, have been associated with increased professional growth for teachers, stronger connections to school improvement goals and/or greater student achievement (Brandt, 1996). Recent research on alternative teacher evaluation systems attests to the contribution teacher evaluation can make when teacher evaluation has strong connections to professional development and school reform (Dawson & Acker-Hocevar, 1998; Johnson, 1998; McKay, 1998; Wagner & Hill, 1996).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether educators in districts using state-mandated (traditional) teacher evaluation systems or educators in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived teacher evaluation as having a stronger positive impact on school improvement, professional development and student learning.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. Do educators in school districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems or educators in school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceive a stronger positive impact on school improvement?
2. Do educators in school districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems or educators in school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceive a stronger positive impact on professional development?
3. Do educators in school districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems or educators in school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceive a stronger positive impact on student learning?

From the research questions the following null hypotheses were derived and were tested for purposes of this study:

1. There is no significant difference in educators' perceptions regarding the positive impact of teacher evaluation on school improvement between school districts using state-

mandated teacher evaluation systems and school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems.

2. There is no significant difference in educators' perceptions regarding the positive impact of teacher evaluation on professional development between school districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems and school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems.
3. There is no significant difference in educators' perceptions regarding the positive impact of teacher evaluation on student learning between school districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems and school districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems.

This study is significant because it contributes to the body of teacher evaluation literature by offering a large-scale, mixed method study comparing educators' perceptions on the impact of teacher evaluation on school improvement, professional development and school improvement in districts using state-mandated and locally developed teacher evaluation systems. Davis (1999), in a review of the articles published in *The Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education,* found a need for more empirical research. Cousins (1995), found that (a) most research studies were limited to qualitative methods that were unable to detect trends and themes that could be generalized over school systems and (b) much of the research was geared towards teachers' perceptions with little emphasis on supervisors' perceptions. This study adds value to the field by filling a gap that exists in the teacher evaluation literature.

## Theoretical Framework

This direction was established based on a review of literature in which five criteria for effective teacher evaluation emerged (Colby, 2001). The five criteria included (a) purposes for evaluation match the methods/procedures; (b) district commitment is evident in sound policies and practices and appropriate allocation of time and resources; (c) teacher evaluation is tightly connected to district priorities and school functions such as school improvement, professional development and student learning; (d) educational leaders play a strong, positive role in evaluation; and (e) the evaluation environment is supportive of ongoing, professional learning. These criteria reflect the foundation for effective teacher evaluation that was established beginning in the 1980's, and reflect trends in the field developed after the mid 1990's focusing on school reform, school cultures, and connections between teaching and learning processes. One of these five criteria was used for this study: Teacher evaluation is tightly connected to district priorities and school functions such as school improvement, professional development and student learning.

## Methodology

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to determine whether educators in districts using state-mandated teacher evaluation systems or educators in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived a stronger impact on school improvement, professional development, and student learning. Data from educators in twenty-one public school systems forming the northeastern region of North Carolina were collected for purposes of this study. Quantitative data were used primarily, while qualitative data were used to confirm the findings and provide interpretive resources for understanding the results.

The quantitative instrument used to gather data was the Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP) questionnaire developed by Stiggans and Duke (1988) which examines educators' perceptions in

relation to teacher evaluation experiences. The TEP instrument was developed based on three research studies identifying and then confirming criteria for effective teacher evaluation (Stiggans and Duke, 1988). The TEP questionnaire was revised by adding an additional ten questions to provide further information about educators' perceptions in regards to teacher evaluation. The TEP questionnaire was distributed to 7,419 teachers in the 21 participating school districts. A total of 4,092 (55%) questionnaires were returned.

ANOVA were conducted to determine whether or not to reject the three null hypotheses. For coding purposes, 15 of the 21 districts were identified as districts using primarily the state-mandated (traditional) teacher evaluation system (TPAI group), 3 districts were identified as using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system (LDA group), and 3 districts were identified as hybrid systems (Hybrid group). The hybrid group was created after reviewing data from the TEP asking teachers to identify the type of teacher evaluation system they most recently used. These three districts had a high percentage of teachers using an informal alternative evaluation which differed from the three districts identified for purposes of this study as using a locally developed alternative evaluation system seeking validation from the state for formal use.

In addition to the quantitative data gathered from the TEP questionnaire, qualitative data were gathered from interviews with the personnel director in each of the 21 participating districts and from focus group sessions with educators from the three districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems. The process for reducing the interview and focus group data was (a) create a transcript for each interview and focus group session, (b) create a document for each null hypothesis by extracting all quotes from the interviews and focus groups that pertained to that topic (e.g. school improvement, professional development, student learning), (c) review each document and categorize the quotes into themes, (d) classify all quotes under the appropriate theme, and, (e) analyze the findings. This study incorporated triangulation, a method using multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998), in an attempt to ensure validity of the results.

## Results

Null Hypothesis One was analyzed by conducting two ANOVA calculations involving one TEP question and the district codes. The TEP question asked teachers to rate the impact of teacher evaluation on school improvement goals. One ANOVA calculation was conducted with all three personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA/Hybrid), and one ANOVA calculation was conducted with two personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA). Both ANOVA calculations were significant at an *a priori* alpha = .05 (see Appendix). Therefore, Null Hypothesis One was rejected.

The rejection of Null Hypothesis One was confirmed by the findings from the qualitative data indicating: (a) a majority of personnel directors from districts using the state-mandated system view teacher evaluation as a stand-alone process rather than a process embedded in school improvement, (b) personnel directors in districts using some form of an alternative teacher evaluation system found them to be embedded in school improvement efforts, and (c) focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems indicated that these systems were aligned with school improvement efforts.

Null Hypothesis Two was analyzed by conducting eight ANOVA calculations involving four TEP questions and the district codes. These four TEP questions asked teachers to rate the impact of teacher evaluation on (a) their attitudes about teaching, (b) their teaching behaviors

and strategies, (c) their understanding of the teaching-learning process, and (d) the quality of teachers. Four each question, one ANOVA calculation was conducted with all three personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA/Hybrid), and one ANOVA calculation was conducted with two personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA). Seven of the eight calculations were significant at an *a priori* alpha = .05 (see Appendix). Therefore, Null Hypothesis Two was rejected.

The rejection of Null Hypothesis Two was confirmed by the findings from the qualitative data indicating: (a) personnel directors from districts using the state-mandated evaluation system viewed the system as having little impact on professional development, (b) focus group participants from districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system also described the state-mandated system as having little impact on professional development, (c) all three personnel directors from districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system viewed these systems as having a positive impact on professional development, and (d) focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems spoke of their evaluation system as having a positive impact on professional development.

Null Hypothesis Three was analyzed by conducting six ANOVA calculations involving three TEP questions and the district codes. Two of the three TEP questions asked teachers to rate the impact of teacher evaluation on (a) student learning and (b) student achievement. The third TEP question asked to what extent was the examination of student achievement used in the teacher evaluation process. Four each question, one ANOVA calculation was conducted with all three personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA/Hybrid), and one ANOVA calculation was conducted with two personnel director codes (TPAI/LDA). All six calculations were significant at an *a priori* alpha = .05 (see Appendix). Therefore, Null Hypothesis Three was rejected.

The rejection of Null Hypothesis Three was confirmed by the findings from the qualitative data which indicated: (a) many of the personnel directors viewed the state-mandated evaluation system as having little impact on student learning, (b) personnel directors in districts using some form of an alternative found them to be connected to student learning, (c) focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems indicated that their alternative teacher evaluation systems had an impact on student learning, and (d) when comparing the state-mandated evaluation system and locally developed alternatives, focus group participants indicated that alternatives had a greater impact on student learning.

## Conclusions

Four conclusions were drawn regarding the results of this study. These conclusions are presented below.

Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on school improvement than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study. The quantitative findings (TPAI) indicated that teachers in districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system perceived teacher evaluation as having a stronger impact on school improvement than did teachers in districts using a state-mandated teacher evaluation system. The qualitative findings also indicated that educators in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived teacher evaluation as having a stronger impact on school improvement than did teachers in districts using the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI). In general, personnel directors from districts using the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI) perceived teacher evaluation as a stand-alone process. None of these personnel directors perceived the evaluation process as one that was

embedded in school improvement efforts. However, many of these personnel directors expressed a desire for teacher evaluation to have more of an impact on school improvement and many directors discussed strategies that their district had implemented to make connections stronger between teacher evaluation and school improvement. In contrast, personnel directors in districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system indicated that their alternative system was connected to school improvement processes. Further, they were able to articulate strategies that were implemented to better able their teacher evaluation system to focus specifically on their district's improvement initiatives. Focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems also viewed their teacher evaluation system as connected to school improvement. They perceived the locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system as one that provided a focus for the district and strengthened the educational process by aligning goals and objectives with district priorities.

Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on professional development than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study. The quantitative findings indicated that teachers in districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system perceived that teacher evaluation had a stronger impact on professional development than did teachers in districts using the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI). This was confirmed by personnel directors from districts using the TPAI, personnel directors from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems, and focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems. Fifteen of the 18 personnel directors from districts using the TPAI perceived the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI) as having little or no impact on professional development. A desire to explore an alternative teacher evaluation system was mentioned by 7 of these 18 directors. In contrast, personnel directors from districts using both formal and informal alternative teacher evaluation systems perceived alternative teacher evaluation systems as having greater potential to facilitate professional development. When comparing alternative teacher evaluation systems to the TPAI, personnel directors mentioned that teachers perceived the TPAI as a process that created little challenge in the area of professional development. Focus group participants also had this view of the TPAI and alternative teacher evaluation systems. They indicated that in general, evaluation with the TPAI was more of a "dog and pony" show while evaluation on the locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system was more comprehensive and challenging. A few focus group participants acknowledged that when evaluated by the TPAI, they did little to change teaching performance. In contrast, they found the alternative to be more demanding, internally motivating, and able to engage them in a learning process in regards to their own teaching. In addition, they perceived a positive effect on teaching performance and teacher quality.

Locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems were perceived as having a stronger impact on student learning than the state-mandated teacher evaluation system in this study. The quantitative findings indicated that teachers in districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system perceived that teacher evaluation had a stronger impact on student learning than did teachers in districts using the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI). This was confirmed by personnel directors from districts using the TPAI, personnel directors from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems, and focus group participants from districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems. Personnel directors from districts using the TPAI perceived the state-mandated teacher evaluation system (TPAI) as having little or no impact on student learning. These personnel

directors stated that the TPAI was more focused on teaching than learning, was not designed to account for student learning, and that it had outlived its purpose. Many of these personnel directors discussed the potential for teacher evaluation to influence student performance and acknowledged their desire to see this happen. Some of these personnel directors discussed district strategies that were implemented to make a stronger connection between teacher evaluation and student learning. In contrast, personnel directors in districts using locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems indicated that their evaluation systems were impacting student learning. Focus group participants also indicated that locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems impacted student learning. They viewed alternative teacher evaluation systems as an increased professional challenge resulting in better student performance, and as a process that helped them learn more about the progress of their students and strategies to help them progress. In addition, this was confirmed when comparisons were made between the locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems and the TPAI, a few focus group participants indicated that the locally developed alternatives had a greater impact on student learning. They perceived the locally developed alternatives as having a stronger connection to student learning for two reasons: (a) student data was used in the evaluation process, and (b) formal processes were implemented which made teachers consciously aware of what students were learning by tracking and monitoring student performance.

The teacher evaluation policies and practices developed and implemented in the districts using a locally developed teacher evaluation system were better able to support district school reform initiatives, guide professional development for teachers, and use student learning as a focus for teacher evaluation. The findings of this study indicated that the locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems identified for purposes of this study were developed with the intent to integrate teacher evaluation and school improvement, professional development and student learning, and, therefore these systems were better able to support school improvement efforts, professional development for teachers and initiatives to increase student learning. This was also evident in the policies and practices of the three districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system. Connections in practice may be more of a matter of local processes than the specific instrument being used. The three locally developed alternative teacher evaluation systems identified for purposes of this study were quite different from each other. What was similar in all three of these districts was (a) the vision that teacher evaluation could impact school improvement, professional development and student learning; (b) the articulation of the vision in policies and practices for teacher evaluation that created and supported strong connections; and (c) the ability of district administrators to design and implement a process for making connections in practice through a variety of strategies.

## Implications

Two implications for practice were identified based on this research study. These implications are presented below.

Teacher evaluation policies and practices can serve as a catalyst for creating connections in practice between school improvement, professional development and student learning. The findings from this research study suggested that teacher evaluation systems could be used by school districts to create a greater impact on school improvement, professional development and student learning. By consciously creating connections for teacher evaluation to impact school improvement, professional development and student learning, greater progress in all three areas can be realized.

Developing teacher evaluation systems at the local level is a viable strategy for strengthening teacher evaluation and its connections to school improvement, professional development and student learning. The findings from this study demonstrated that by making decisions at the district level to develop, implement, monitor and continually improve a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system, a structure can be created to channel district resources into support for the district's school improvement initiatives and the increased professional development of teachers and student learning. Districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system implemented formal processes to insure these connections were strong.

The districts using a locally developed alternative teacher evaluation system in this study realized the potential of teacher evaluation to make substantial contributions to teaching and learning more readily than the districts using the state-mandated evaluation system (TPAI) due to their ability to facilitate connections in practice. Considering that teacher evaluation is a regular part of daily life in public schools, using locally developed alternatives that have a greater possibility for increasing the quality of education for children is a judicious decision.

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## Appendix
## Statistical Results for Null Hypotheses One-Three

Statistical Results for Null Hypothesis One

| Analysis of Variance | F-ratio | p |
|---|---|---|
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on School Improvement | 7.803 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on School Improvement | 6.832 | .009* |

*p<.05

Statistical Results for Null Hypothesis Two

| Analysis of Variance | F-ratio | p |
|---|---|---|
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on Attitudes about Teaching | 8.892 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on Teaching Behaviors and Strategies | 20.191 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on the Teaching-Learning Process | 10.301 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on the Quality of Teachers | 3.260 | .039* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on Attitudes about Teaching | 15.179 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on Teaching Behaviors and Strategies | 33.931 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on the Teaching-Learning Process | 18.294 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on the Quality of Teachers | 3.191 | .074 |

*p<.05

Statistical Results for Null Hypothesis Three

| Analysis of Variance | F-ratio | p |
|---|---|---|
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on Student Learning | 14.922 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and Their Impact on Student Achievement | 10.586 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA/Hybrid and The Extent to which Student Achievement Data was Examined | 9.271 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on Student Learning | 22.479 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and Their Impact on Student Achievement | 18.181 | .000* |
| Analysis of Variance for TPAI/LDA and The Extent to which Student Achievement Data was Examined | 18.094 | .000* |

*$p < .05$